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Responding to the Epidemic of Student Stress and Anxiety

Leigh Colburn

The Centergy Project, leigh@thecentergyproject.com

Linda Beggs

The Centergy Project, linda@thecentergyproject.com


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Recommended Citation

Colburn, Leigh and Beggs, Linda, "Responding to the Epidemic of Student Stress and Anxiety" (2021).
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Responding to the Epidemic of Student Stress and Anxiety

Leigh Colburn & Linda Beggs

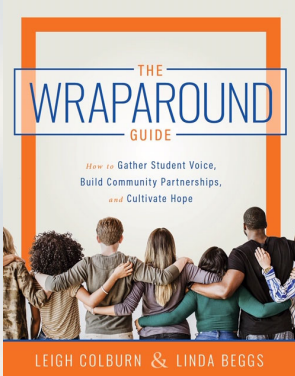
National Youth at Risk
March 2021

THE CENTERGY PROJECT
A Student Wraparound Initiative

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This afternoon, we'll explore:

- Statistics, research
- Student voice
- Actionable ideas for how a school can best respond to the emotional needs of its students.



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Children and Stress

Stress interferes with short term memory, which is electrical in form and very easily disrupted. It's housed in the Limbic System and is the brain's 'clearinghouse' or control center.

All information flows in and out of the Limbic System.

Stress interrupts the flow of information in and out of the center, thus learning and memory are disrupted.

3

A Look at the Numbers

- Anxiety and depression in children and teens are **on the rise**, and their occurrence **"cuts across all demographics—suburban, urban and rural; those who are college bound and those who aren't"** (Schrobsdorff, 2016).
- "Mental health disorders are **the most common health issues faced by our nation's school-aged children. One in five** children suffers from a mental health or learning disorder" (Child Mind Institute, 2016, p. 1).
- **The suicide rate** in the United States has soared to **a near thirty-year high**, and the suicide rate of girls ages ten to fourteen tripled between 1999 and 2014 (Curtin, Warner, & Hedegaard, 2016).
- **Self-harm** is not universal among teens with depression and anxiety, but it does **"appear to be the signature symptom of this generation's mental-health difficulties"** (Schrobsdorff, 2016).

<https://www.propublica.org/article/the-lost-year-what-the-pandemic-cost-teenagers>

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"If you wanted to create an environment to churn out really angsty people, we've done it. It's that they're in a cauldron of stimulus they can't get away from, or don't want to get away from, or don't know how to get away from."

Schrobsdorff, 2016

Current research attributes contemporary angst to:

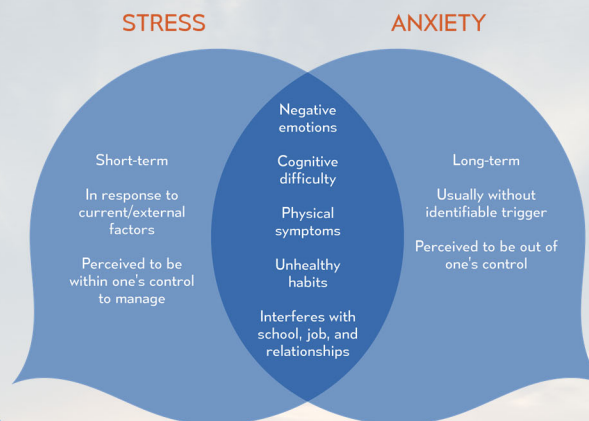
- **Hyper-connectedness** (habitually using internet-connected devices),
- **Overexposure** (receiving excessive exposure to constant stimuli), and
- **Competitiveness** (constantly feeling compared to and in competition with peers).

Janis Whitlock, Cornell Research Program on Self-Injury and Recovery



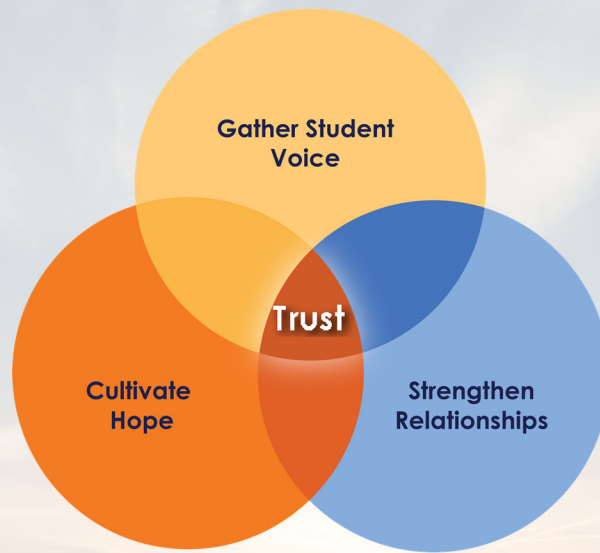
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What We've learned from Students



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Trust isn't on the plate...it is the plate!



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6 Behaviors to Build Trust with Teens

- Talk Straight
- Demonstrate Respect
- Right Wrongs
- Show Loyalty
- Listen First
- Extend Trust



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Dos and Don'ts of gathering student voice

Do

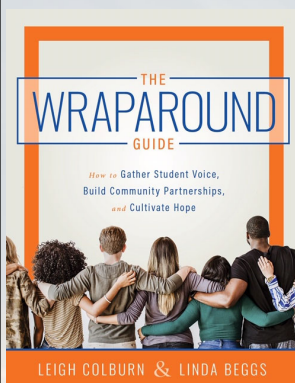
- ✓ Check your intent
- ✓ Keep pronouns third person
- ✓ Avoid the word "problem"
- ✓ Use an open-ended "what" not "why"
- ✓ Say "Tell me more about that."

Don't

- ✗ Listen autobiographically
- ✗ "Pearl clutch"
- ✗ Take the wheel
- ✗ Make assumptions
- ✗ Minimize their experience
- ✗ "Parrot" their language

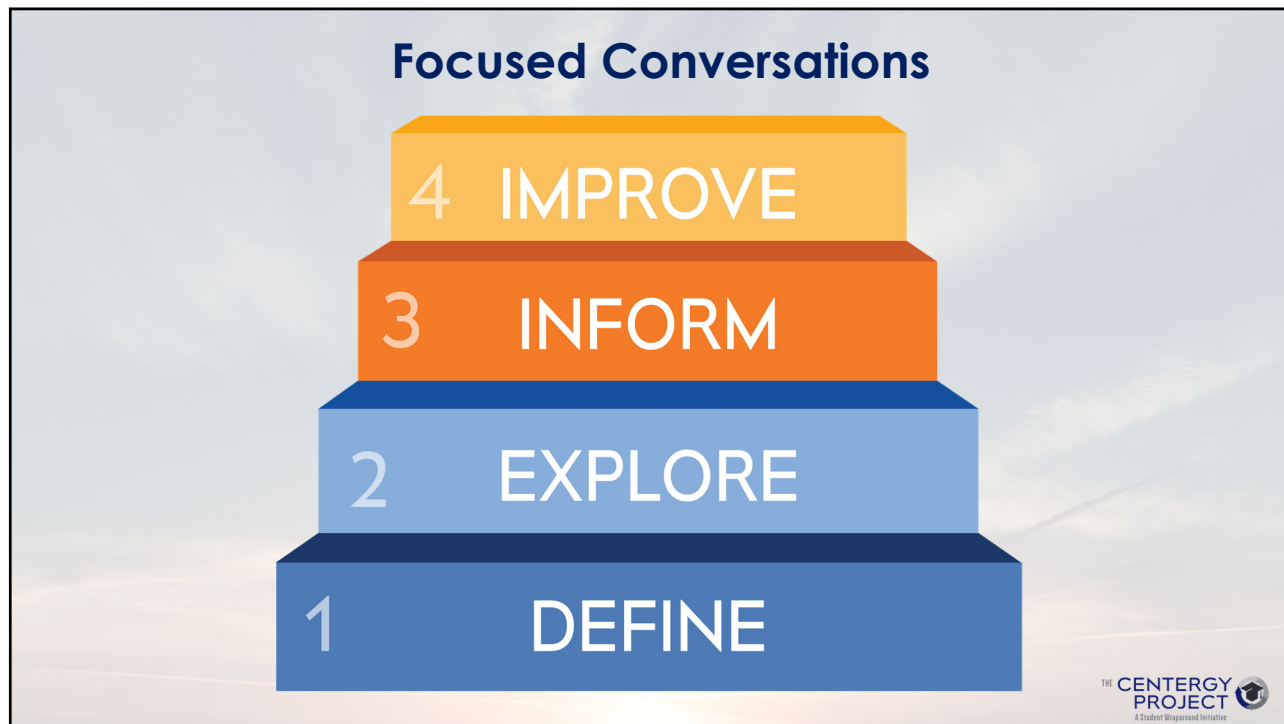
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Processes for Gathering Student Voice



Student Voice Process	Student Participants	Time of Year
Conversation Circles	Groups of students	As needed
Off-track Interviews	Individual Student	As needed
Legacy Stories, Graduation Stories	Transition Grade Levels (Ex. 5 th , 8 th , 12 th)	End of Year, Transition Grades
Student Voice Needs Assessment	Whole School, Grade level, or Individual depending upon purpose	Anonymous, Annually at the beginning of the year Non-anonymous, as needed on individual basis
Focused Conversations	Individual or Group	As needed

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What is stress? - Usually a response to an external cause - a deadline, a test, an argument. Stress usually subsides once the situation is resolved. Almost everyone experiences stress. What helps? Physical activity, breathing exercises, adequate sleep, and connecting with others.

What is anxiety? It's origin is internal. A "persistent feeling of apprehension or dread" in situations that are not actually threatening. Anxiety persists after a concern has passed. Anxiety disorders are the most common emotional/mental health issue in USA. Stress is a common trigger for anxiety, but anxiety is more serious.

Impact of chronic and unregulated anxiety:
Symptoms like those of a heart attack; chest pain, sweating, feeling faint, nausea, chills, breathing difficulties.

Other words/descriptions for anxiety: social anxiety, panic attacks, phobias, OCD, PTSD, pain in the butt, tsunami, exaggerating, dramatic, childish, nervous.

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Self-medicating Me
 makes me angry
 it makes me want to harm myself - cutting/suicide
 lowers my self-worth, thinking about all the things I fail at
 makes me shut-down
 makes me stay in my room
 makes me isolate myself
 makes it hard to process my thoughts
 makes me stay quiet
 makes me not eat / eat too much
 makes me want to sleep / not sleep

My Family
 causes fighting with my sister
 causes me to distance myself
 impacted my bond with my sisters
 they stress out about me
 addiction runs in my family
 abuse runs in my family and it is all connected
 my relatives have "disowned" me
 has had a financial impact on my family for my services

My friends
 I have lost friends
 makes me not know where I stand with my friends - I need lots of reassurance
 I impact their emotions negatively
 They try to help but they don't know how
 Friendship with me can negatively impact their reputation
 I feel like they are talking about me behind my back

My schooling
 makes me miss school
 cause me to shut-down + not listen
 angry outburst that cause discipline consequences
 makes me procrastinate
 makes me lose my motivation when it gets to testing time because my stress/anxiety overwhelms me and I shut down
 things people say (students, teachers) made me lose motivation

4 IMPROVE
3 INFORM
2 EXPLORE
1 DEFINE

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Are there certain School situations, experiences, or times that escalate or "trigger" stress or anxiety in a manner that impacts your life negatively?
 being invited to a meeting and not knowing why
 being called over the intercom (Academic competition)
Storms
 pep rallies/assemblies, events w/ lots of noise, emotion, energy
 crowded hallways or lunchroom
 being the center of attention
 presentations, having to present
 understanding some topics can increase stress or anxiety
 Situations with conflict (debates, disagreements, discussions that are heated) can be terrifying and I shut down, cry, or my emotions become heightened or overwhelming
 being late to class or having to leave class
 Students joking can make it worse with all their sarcasm or turning my actions/experiences into a joke

Are there certain School situations, experiences or times that escalate or "trigger" anxiety in a manner that impacts your life in a negative way?
 Seeing someone I'm trying to avoid
 Calling my name over the intercom
 Having to present in front of class
 Seeing someone I'm trying to avoid
 Not being given options
 Large crowds
 Transition times
 Being called out
 Having to make groups in class when you don't know anyone
 Being called out even when hand isn't raised
 Being told to "calm down"
 Being told "I'm overreacting"
 Someone touches me
 fighting w/ friends - every guy friend he had has left me. Started with my dad
 lots of same due dates
 procrastination

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Does anxiety have an impact on how you are doing in school? What would you want teachers or school staff to know or understand about a teen's struggle to manage anxiety?

I choose my transition path to minimize interaction. I shut down: get defensive

My earbuds help me cope during transition. There isn't music on but I use them to avoid people/conversation. I dissociate

My grades are low because I don't ask for help. I want to leave

It takes us time to get back on track. When my panic attacks happen right after I feel weak, tired, & lost so it would take some time to get back to what I'm doing. I want teachers to know anxiety isn't just a stressful moment - it means my mind (or someone else's) is going on a rampage.

I break down & cry. Can't focus

Yes - how we present ourselves & we don't always want to talk about it. Makes me zone out, get paranoid. If someone looks at me I run to the bathroom.

Fear because other students get bullied and I have experienced it too.

I won't raise my hand. If someone is struggling teachers instead of ignoring it and then they should submit them out of class with someone they trust. Excuse me from things or give more time. That it is not easy!

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When my anxiety peaks at school, others might see ... (personal behaviors)

I Shutter ✓
Aggressive / mad ✓
Fidgeting ✓
Panic Attacks ✓
I dissociate
Speed walking
Breathing Fast ✓
Talking to myself
Chest Pain
Sleeping in Class ✓
Stupid or think I'm crazy
Nervous laughter
Foot tapping
Wide eyes
Stretching / slapping fingers
Walk out of class

Hiding in my clothes
Shaking ✓
I walk away ✓
Eyes watering
Itching
leg bounces
Not making eye contact
Look at my phone
Isolation ✓
Avoiding Others
Crying ✓
weary
Stare off in distance
Paranoia
Can't focus
Hiding all over

get quiet ✓
go to the bathroom a lot - I just cry
Being Rude

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If there is one thing I could tell others about students (teens) dealing with stress and anxiety in their lives, I would want others to know...

Sometimes we have a hard time expressing our thoughts, concerns, and questions and sometimes we have a hard time asking for help. *.*.*.*

Emotions are sometimes contagious. *.*.*.*

My family is not all that I am. Mental illness, addiction, and suicide run in my family but it is not my fault.

Sometimes I need to disengage and the teachers keep trying to engage me right then when I am flooded. *.*.*.*

When I hurt myself, it is because I don't have a way to release all of the emotion. *.*.*.*

Teachers (and others) don't always understand what they see. Stress and anxiety can be, can look like.....

panic, panic attacks, tics, outbursts, cutting, getting high/drank, being on my phone in social settings, being confused, not being able to remember what happened, or what was taught, passing out, stomach aches, headaches, fidgeting, skipping class, being absent *.*.*.*

Guys have anxiety but it doesn't mean I'm weak. *.*.*.*

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Is there a way the school or school staff can assist you in addressing/handling anxiety when it arises?

Allowing me to step outside the class ✓✓✓✓

Listening to music ✓

Call one of my best friends to help me calm down if not call my parents frequent meetings

listen helping us find a job for real-life experiences that make us cope with our anxiety

let me breathe & cry

Ask a friend to help calm me down if possible - if not call my parents but NO hospital because I don't have insurance + the bill would be high + I will panic even more

Help me find a place to be alone ✓

Give me a chance to express myself

Breathing exercises - help with + teach how

Squeeze my wrist, not too hard, to help me snap out of it

talk to me calmly

leave me alone

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What can we do to make school a safe place for you to talk about or seek help related to stress or anxiety?

- teacher/staff education + nurse training
- We don't want to be sent to residential or alternative school
- having trained counselors/therapists available who know how to listen and how to communicate with empathy, nonjudgement, compassion, and to help you "unpack it" not solve it - go soft w/ solutions and suggestions
- Less judgement
- Having staff or someone to talk to who has experienced it.
- We don't want school staff to over react knowing there could be consequences, being labeled, or stereotyped makes me not want to ask for help
- making me feel safe - not labeled, watched, targeted, or not make me feel like something is wrong with me
- Let me have a quiet place

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What types of services, programming, staffing, events, and activities related to stress, anxiety, and emotional wellness do you think would benefit our students?

- Parent + teacher education about stress + anxiety
- having a room that we can chill, calm down, process without consequences
- having a place to post thoughts about emotions
- having a place to deal with social anxiety during lunch, assemblies, + pep rallies
- having more choice in classes about to participate debates, class lessons that involve conflict, or making presentations
- I think it is great when teachers give us the chance to tell them "10 things I should know about you"
- The health curriculum should be updated to include more information about social and emotional and mental health - not just physical health
- Yoga and meditation as a pe. class/elective
- Having an option to bring an ally with us to meetings
- Therapy day
- Having therapists at school
- Having a support group
- Having clubs that are chill - reading, board games, chess, yoga, art, knitting
- Having a place students can get information about emotions, strategies for calming down, and letting students know who they can go see who about different issues

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What types of services, programming, staffing, events, and activities related to stress, anxiety, and emotional wellness do you think would benefit our students?

PREVENTION

- Having more choice in classes about having to participate in debates, make whole class presentations or lessons that involve "forced" conflict
- Having a "do not call my name over the intercom" list
- I think it is great when teachers give us the chance to tell them "10 things I should know about you"
- Having clubs that are chill-reading, board games, chess, art, music, knitting, crocheting
- Yoga, Meditation, Tai Chi classes as a PE course
- Therapy Dog
- PLEASE don't YELL or fuss at the whole class about something only a few students are doing
- Pop tests are awful and real "triggers" - just know it

EDUCATION

- Parent and teacher education about stress + anxiety
- Community screening of the movie *Anxiety* with a G+A afterward with therapists
- The health curriculum REALLY needs to be updated with information about social + emotional + mental health not just physical health. Information like:
 - ① Signs + ...
 - ② Successful coping... unsuccessful coping...
 - ③ How to know when it is time to get help...
 - ④ How to be a good friend to someone who has...
- Having a place students can get info about emotional health, strategies for calming down, and letting students know what they can go see about different issues.
- Training all staff in de-escalation techniques

SUPPORT

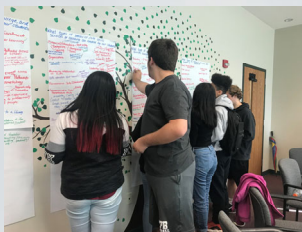
- Having a "safe" and comfortable room where we can chill, calm down, and process without consequences
- Really good information in advance with reminders about assignments and tests is really helpful
- Having a place to post thoughts and get information about available support
- 1:1 Therapy
- Alternatives to suspension when you have screwed up in handling your emotions
- Support groups (Peer or Friend or Therapist led)
- Being able to talk to an adult who had anxiety as a teen and who is getting along good as an adult
- Having a place to go when social anxiety peaks like during lunch, a "crazy" transition time like if there was a night, during pep rallies or assemblies
- Art + Music Therapy options
- I need more encouragement than other students and its helpful when teachers know that
- Being in a mentoring program
- Listening to music and having my headphones is even better I am not listening to anything help during class change or in loud activities

SUSTAINABILITY

- 1:1 Therapy
- Support Groups
- Having a school climate that decreases stigma
- Plot of kids with anxiety have big issues with self-esteem, self-doubt and overshinking. It may sound silly but having positive quotes in the classroom and around the building and hearing positive words can help alot.
- Having teen groups just to talk about all kinds of subjects and to meet others. Sometimes just having others to talk to really helps.
- Having a designated ally (friend or staff member) as a resource for support. It helps through emotions, experiences - being able to bring them to uninteresting
- Yoga, Meditation, Tai Chi classes as a PE course or after school and open to all students
- It would be great if teachers were trained in practicing techniques and de-stress activities and meditation and they used them or encouraged us to use them in class
- Therapy Dog
- Having a school where students and teachers really care about each other and there is a lot of trust because my anxiety causes me to have trust issues

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Additional uses of Focused Conversations Results



- ✓ Host a carousel walk at faculty meetings followed by facilitated large- or small-group conversations to discuss potential changes to practices, programming, and possibly even policy.
- ✓ Use the charts and compilation documents with potential partners to design services and programming responding to the voices you have gathered.
- ✓ Include cogent comments in newsletters and grant applications, always being sensitive to honor rather than exploit students' experiences.

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"What is something I can I do tomorrow to better support my students?"

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ME

- My mental state got a lot worse
- lack of motivation to do things
- don't want to hang out with people
- stay in my room
- isolation
- fear getting sick
- I get no sleep
- I'm losing myself
- hearing about innocent lives lost has really affected me
- suicidal thoughts, anxiety, and self harm
- cried more tears than ever before
- racial injustice situations have really bothered me
- sadness from nowhere

2020 IMPACT

FRIENDS

- don't want to see friends any more
- compete for who has the worst situation
- separate because of different ideology on current issues
- lost touch with friends but also made new ones
- they have parent issues because of this
- Covid has divided friends
- with election and race issues, friends are constantly fighting

SCHOOLING

- I'm lost
- unmotivated and have a hard time concentrating
- I don't focus on school like I used to
- teachers dismiss students' mental illness
- heavy workload
- worried about graduation
- harder to understand online
- declining grades
- No motivation for anything with grades
- Glad to be back bc I'm not an online learner
- affected absences
- no projects and hate
- wearing masks / grades aren't as high
- lots more arguing
- death / loss of family members
- struggles increased because we are together too long
- Divorced because of this
- financial worries
- family disputes and fights
- family together and closer

FAMILY

How has '2020' impacted my grades, my learning, and my schooling?

We are on computers more. More videos. Masks. Distancing. Teachers are relying more on computers for instruction, practice, examples, and demonstrations.

No more paper in instruction - every assignment is typing, upload it, create it and then take a picture of it. We are "basically still online but just doing it in person."

All assignments - quizzes/tests, projects, even groupwork is computer based, with document share. It takes teachers longer to respond to questions when we are online.

No more hands-on labs are limited. More "busy" work.

Hand sanitizer is literally everywhere.

On-line electives are limited.

We have health committees.

Our band intervals, movements are left apart, chorus is in masks, drill charts are online and I'm not sure we will ever get to perform.

Some classes are easier but some classes are harder because there is not more homework.

Students are required to provide ALL (if) their own supplies (paint brushes, calculators, tools for CTE classes) - NO sharing.

At-home lack of connectivity is negatively impacting my grades.

Firewalls block pages and page restrictions are real problems.

Technology issues have impacted by ability to participate.

Teachers are really trying to make it normal, but it's just not.

We actually have more clubs but it's not the full experience.

Online can be boring and depressing.

Bus transportation has really been impacted - sanitizer when you get on/off, masks required, distancing.

Harder to be a student leader when school is not face to face.

My handwriting is really suffering.

No pep rallies, dances, grade level activities. Most of the special activities are cancelled.

For sure there will be no homecoming.

Athletics, arts, and CTE are all really suffering.

Important summer programming and college visits have almost all been cancelled.

It's really hard to be a ninth grader or new student - no activities to help you meet other students, no orientation with a school tour, no parent meetings in person to meet school staff and ask questions. No real back to school events.

I dropped my elective because I couldn't afford the supplies.

My grades have never been worse. I'm in special education. I just can't work as hard as needed.

I have lost most of my interest in school.

I lost part of my junior year. We are back in school now but I still feel like I'm missing my senior year.

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What helps you come back from something difficult?

Asking for and receiving forgiveness

Being given another chance by someone who believes in me

Apologizing and accepting responsibility

Learning from my mistakes

Knowing I will know how to avoid making this mistake in the future

Being treated with respect even though I screwed up or did something wrong

Accepting the consequences that come my way and then moving on

Having some quiet and alone time to think through my next steps

Using my experience or mistakes to help someone else

Talking with someone who understands because they have been through something similar

Having teachers or others respond with caring and compassion even though I've messed up

Having some privacy and time to come to terms with what has happened and then begin to figure out how to move forward so I am not dwelling in the past.

Not being judged continually by the "adults" in the building for my worst "bad thing"

Finding a positive place or being with non-judgy people who help me move on

Having teachers who really know me not just how I act

Having a mentor

Thinking about the big picture

Doing something I'm good at

Doing something physical to work it out (like stress, figure out the problem, get my mind off it, etc)

Being able to talk to someone who listens.

Having therapy

Unpacking "it" then packing "it" back up

Being with people who have a positive opinion of me

Focusing on a positive and important goal

Having a source of motivation and hope

Someone to talk to

Someone who will listen

Someone who knows where you are coming from

Someone you trust

Name: _____

If you really knew me you would know...

these 5 things about me as a person

these 5 things about me as a learner

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If I knew I Couldn't Fail I Would...

If my teachers (school) really knew me, they would know.....

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If my teachers really knew me, they would know...

that i have alot of things going on but i dont talk about it.

Something my teacher don't know about me is i deal with depression & anxiety.

If you could help me I would ask you to help with my emotional strength.

that I am kinda shy to talk in front of lots of people. Even I am shy to talk in front of students.

that I always sleep and even though I take sleep pills

I want to go to college but I'm scared

They would know that i'm very unconfident in myself.

I have had anxiety and it make 2020 alot harder

I can only learn hands on. I don't do stress yet well

They would know what I struggle Sometimes.

If the school really knew me they would know about me depression.

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They would know that I don't feel exsupted

That I stress a lot and that I feel over whelmed about work some times

They would know..

- I cry alot more than people think I do
- I'm Pansexual (I date deatite Gender)
- I'm a afraid of failure
- I'm actually really sensitive
- I don't like confrontation
- I'm a afraid of being about done

They would know that my Grandfather died and it was difficult for me to go to school. And my Uncle shot himself.

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EVERYTHING I KNOW ABOUT THIS TOPIC BUT WASN'T ASKED ON THE TEST

What is light - energy that we can see

Luminous - things that give off light
examples - candles, light bulbs, sun, fire, etc

non luminous examples - moon, people, butterflies, etc

crest

tough

All energy travels in waves.

energy can't be created or destroyed

visible - things the human eyes can see.

example of a radio - tvs

ultra-violet - used to find jaundice in babies.

Incandescent - heat and light

fluorescent - electrical - uv - light

phosphorescent - visible - uv - light

chemiluminescent - chemical reaction to visible light

absorb

reflect

transmit

light is drawn with straight lines with arrows

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A Student Wraparound Initiative

THE WRAPAROUND GUIDE

How to Gather Student Voice,
Build Community Partnerships,
and Cultivate Hope

LEIGH COLBURN & LINDA BEGGS

To learn more about Wraparound Services,
visit us on the web at
www.thecentergyproject.com

Twitter: @CentergyProject

leigh@thecentergyproject.com

linda@thecentergyproject.com

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